

The Dark Root -Part 4

by Ludwig

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Chapter Six

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The softness of silk!

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That was the first thought crossing Cordelia's mind as she was regaining consciousness. She was feeling the soft touch of her silk pillow pressed against her cheek and she took note of this. Yet the young woman had no idea why that seemed so important right now. She had woken up with her head on that pillow dozens of time before without taking a single moment to consider how comfortable it actually was. Something was not right with this. For some reason she could feel it. Then the memories came crashing back in her conscious mind; the man, the vision, the darkness falling in as she was lying on her apartment floor! She opened her eyes and sat up abruptly. All around her there was darkness and yet she recognized her surrounding and felt at ease. She was sitting on her bed, in her own bedroom. Cordelia shot a look at the digital clock on the night stand. Nine fifteen pm. She rubbed her eyes and stretched her arms.

"It was a dream." she thought out loud "It was just a dream."

Then, she realized she was not alone in the room. Someone was in there with her, motionless in the dark. At first, she hoped it might have been Denis, her ghost, roaming about the place as he sometimes did. But then, her hopes were dispelled when she saw the shadowy outline near the bedroom door. She felt her heart tighten in her chest, gripped with a primal fear that only a woman can feel when she's alone with a stranger in the dark.

"Whom's there?" she finally managed to say. As if to answer, the shadow moved and suddenly, the room was filled with light coming from the ceiling lamp. With the shadow now gone, the young woman saw the bandana man sitting at the foot of her bed, calmly watching her. She literally jumped out of bed on the opposite side and took the digital clock, intending to use it as a weapon if need be. The man did not move a muscle although he kept his eyes on her. She noticed he was now looking at her with a faint smile on his lips and she also felt the cool air of the room brushing against her skin. Cordelia looked down at herself and, to her horror, saw she was completely naked. Immediately, she grabbed the bed sheets with her free hand and covered her body with them as best she could.

"Good evening, miss Chase," said the man. "I trust you are well rested from your earlier ordeal."

She said nothing and lifted the clock threateningly. The man looked at her makeshift weapon and his smile widened.

"Now now, lets not get carried away again, shall we? I assure you, theres no need for this," he said, pointing to the clock. "But if you insist on brandishing a weapon at me, at least use one that is likely to do some damage."

He fished the bowie knife out of his duster's pocket and threw it on the bed, right in front of her. She dropped the clock and seized the blade's handle. It was heavier than it looked but she felt confident she could adequately wield it in her own defense. But the man was still leaning his chair against the bedroom door and did not look intimidated by her in the least. And even if she could somehow get past him, running out in the street half-naked was not an option for Cordelia.

"Why did you take my clothes?" she asked angrily. "I swear to God if

you did anything to me while i was out i'llâ€|"

To her dismay, the man simply laughed.

"Trust me, child," he said, regaining his composure "i did nothing of the kind. I discovered long ago that this sort of thing brought me nothing but sorrow. As for your clothes well, i felt it might keep you from running again at the sight of me."

"Do you mind if i get dressed now?" she asked curtly.

"Not at all. Go right ahead."

She looked at him expectantly but he didn't budge.

"I'm afraid i'm not gonna let you out of my sight just yet, miss Chase. Besidesâ€| its nothing i haven't allready seen, you know."

She shot him an furious glare and moved to the drawer where she pulled out some underwear, a blouse and a skirt. Seeing that he wasn't about to jump her, she put the knife down nearby. Still holding the bed sheets, she juggled her clothings onto herself, all of this under the man's amused gaze. Once fully dressed, she picked up the blade and turned to the man.

"All right now!" she said, trying to sound confident "I dont know what kind of gals you're used to deal with but this one works around vampires and demons forty hours a week on a crappy salary. So if you think for one moment i'll hesitate to gut you like the pig you are, you're in for one eye opening experience, buddy. Now get up and move away from the door!"

The man remained seated and shook his head in disapointment at her behaviour.

"I said get up or i'llâ€|"

Moving with blinding speed, the man suddenly got up and covered the distance between them in a split second. He took the knife from the surprised young woman with one hand and, with the other, send sprawling on the bed. Before she could get up again, he landed on top of her and pinned her arms over her head. Cordelia tried to fight him off but he was just too strong.

"Now listen up and listen good because i'm only gonna say this once!" the man said with autority. " I did not come here to rob you or to rape you or to kill you and the reason i haven't done so was not for lack of opportunity. So can we please proceed under the assumption that you're quite safe with me and move this along? I'm really short on time here."

When she stopped squirming, he got off the young woman move away from the bed. She sat up and still looked at him nervously but much of her fear had been dispelled.

"Ok, so you're not an axe murderer," she said. "So what do you want from me?"

"Simply that you agree to take me to your vampire friend, Angel."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"What do you want with Angel?"

"Thats between him and me,young lady," he answered.

"If you think for one moment i'll take you to him so you can kill him,you're..."

"Your concern for this vampire is unusual,to say the least,but i assure you it is quite misplaced. I need your friend to help me avert a terrible danger looming over this city."

Cordelia got out of bed.

"Is this about this Lilith character?"

The man looked at her in shock.

"How do you know about this?!" he asked in disbelief.

"I've had a vision warning us of her coming,whoever she is. You were in my vision as well,calling her name in a street filled with bodies."

"Vision?" he repeated. "You have the gift of foresight?"

"Humph! Gift! If thats what you call getting head wrenching migraines during which you see death and destruction up close and personal than yeah,i suppose i do. Anyway,after i told him about the vision,Angel went out to look for this Lilith last night,to kill her i suppose and i imagine thats what he's gonna do tonight as well."

"What?!" the man yelled. "He's looking for her by himself?! What is he insane?!"

The young woman seemed surprised at his strong reaction.

"He's not insane. Angel has killed plenty of vampires,you know. What's the problem here?"

"The problem,child,is that he's no match for her." the man declared. "She has evicerated entire legions with her bare hands in the past. No single vampire,however special he may be,can hope to defeat her alone!"

Cordelia's eyes widened at the news. She ran past him into the living room and grabbed the phone. She dialed the office's number and let it ring. But after the seventh ring,there was still no answer. The young woman was starting to get scared again,but this time,it was for Angel.

"Harr!.. she made in frustration. "He never answer his damn phone at this hour. If we hurry,we can be there in ten minutes. Call a cab while i get some shoes."

The man complied

"I hope we do get there in time." he said said after hanging up the phone. "For his sakeâ€|and all of

ours"

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Walking the dark streets of Los Angeles, Angel was now in full hunt-and-destroy mode. He had returned from his meeting with the Oracles and found his office deserted. Neither Wesley nor Cordelia had been there all day and he half regretted giving them the day off. But to do otherwise would have been unconscionable. They had spent the whole night looking for info about Lilith and were exhausted when had had found them in the morning. Besides, the vampire felt confident he would take care of this tonight and tomorrow, their lives would return to normal. So he had taken some weapons from his lair and went right back out there. The Oracles had not been as forthcoming as he had hoped but they still told him basically what he wanted to know. Namely that it was Lilith that threatened the city and that she could be killed. They had also given a clue as to how he would be able to locate her and their words still echoed in his mind.

—

"Ã¢|they all hide from the storm, save for those the storm has embracedÃ¢|"

—

He had thought about it for a long while and came to the conclusion that Lilith, while very old indeed, was still a vampire master of some kind, like Lothos. He remembered the old master who had tried to destroy Sunnydale a few years back, before meeting his doom at the hand of the Slayer. As powerful as he was, he still relied on vampire servants to perform many tasks, such as guarding his lair or bringing victims to him. It stood to reason that Lilith would either have brought along a retinue of vamps or assembled one here upon her arrival. And since any vampires not in league with her would be too afraid to come out, those he did come across would probably lead him to her. And, as fate would have it, he didn't even have to look for them. He had found a couple of vamps, a male and a female, roaming about not far from his office. They were both in human guise and seemed to be looking for an easy kill. He followed them around for almost half an hour, going from neighborhood to neighborhood. They stopped from time to time to try and seduce some young girl or boy off the streets but they never really pushed for it, which Angel started to find odd. On two separate occasions, he thought he had been made when the vamps looked in his direction but they never seemed to notice him and just kept on going. After a while, he realized that they had led him in a deserted area of the city, made up of old abandoned warehouses. In the street there were a few beaten up cars parked on the side of the road but not a living soul in sight. This whole thing had the smell of an ambush. They had just been too easy to spot in the first place. It was like they wanted him to follow them here. The vampire decided that it might be wiser to just back off and re-evaluate the situation but when he turned to leave, he spotted two more fledglings not far behind him.

—

Dammit! I walked right into that one. Must be getting old!

—

The first two vamps were now coming back toward him while the second pair was also closing the distance separating them.

—  
Trapped!

—  
The young ones drew stakes as they approached and their faces transformed to reveal their feral nature. Angel took a defensive position facing the first couple but periodically shot quick glances behind to keep track of the other two. When the four of them were within ten feet from him, they attacked as one. Reacting quickly, Angel lunged forward at the female attacker. He twisted his right wrist, activating the spring-mounted stake along his arm and plunged it into her chest, killing her. Immediately, he slapped her companion across the face with the other hand and sent him to the floor. He whirled around just in time to see the third vamp about to stab him with a stake he was holding with both hands over his head. The old vampire caught one of his assailant's arm in mid flight and twisted it violently, impaling the poor sod on his own weapon. As the vamp disintegrated before him, Angel kicked in his falling ashes and sent some in the fourth attacker's eyes, temporarily blinding him. By this time, the second vamp had gotten back up and charged Angel but the latter was ready for his assault. He dodged the lunge that was meant for his heart, grabbed the vamp's head and right arm and flipped him over his shoulder, sending him crashing heavily on the ground. But this time, to make sure he wouldn't get up again, Angel swiftly drew another stake from his belt and hammered it into the vamp's chest, dusting him as well.

The last fledgling was still trying to clear the dust from his eyes and was making wide swings with his stake to keep the elder vamp at bay. Angel walked up to him and the young vampire recovered his sights just in time to see a fist come smashing in his face. He fell on his back and dropped his weapon, which Angel picked up right away. He caught the downed vamp by his jacket and brutally hoisted him to his feet.

"All right, my little friend!" Angel said as he shook his prisoner. "Now the we've gotten those delusions of manhood out of your system, let's have a talk, shall we. I already know that you work for a vampire who calls herself Lilith and I know she probably sent you and your friends to setup this little sparring session we just had here. Now, I'd like to thank her properly for such a thoughtfull gift but I don't know where to send the flowers and I'm betting you do. Now since you appear to be every bit as smart as you're charming, I'll even make it simple for you; you tell me where I can find her and I let you go. How about that?"

The terrified vamp shot a glance across the street, a gesture which Angel noticed. He turned his head in that direction and saw a warehouse with the door still opened. He turned his attention back to the quivering vampire he was holding. Giving a look of disgust, Angel shoved him back hard, landing the poor lad on his backside.

"Now get lost!" said the vampire before starting toward the

warehouse. But before he had gone more than a few steps, he heard the young vamp charging him again. He sidestepped the attack and extended the arm still holding the stake. The attacking vamp impaled himself on it and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

—  
Dumb kids!

—  
The vampire crossed the street all the way to the warehouse's open door, all the while scanning the area for any other potential threats. As he got near the door, he heard a muffled gurgling sound coming from inside. Angel replaced the stake in his belt and took the axe he had slung across his back. Then, he slowly opened the door, wincing at the creaking sound it made, and stepped inside. The scene that he found there was gruesome, to say the least. In the main room of the warehouse, which was otherwise empty, there were half a dozen shriveled bodies that looked like those Kate had shown him from the beach. But as he was contemplating this feast of horror, his eyes finally fell on her, standing in the middle of the room. Her deathly white skin looked as though it could barely contain the bones within and her fingers were so thin that it was hard to tell where the flesh ended and the nails began. The yellowish clothes she was wearing were so worn out that they looked ready to fall to pieces. Atop this grotesque body, her head, little more than a skull with long blond hair, looked even more horrible. The crone's face was partly hidden by the wild, dirty hair, but Angel could see enough of it to decide that he didn't want to see more. Her deep, socketed eyes were trained on him and she was still licking the blood off her oversized fangs with her tongue. The vampire had entered this place not certain of what he would find but this was very far from what he had expected. Lothos, the only other Master Vampire he had met during his two hundred years of existence did have an horrid appearance, exhibiting many deformities which were common on vampires once they reach a certain age. But he had still looked powerful and dangerous whereas this walking corpse, supposedly the root of their entire race, looked downright pathetic. For a moment Angel even caught himself feeling sorry for her but his sympathy died the moment he set again his eyes on the six people she had just slaughtered.

"Well. You must be Lilith, I presume." he said, tightening his grip on his axe. "I've been looking for you for quite some time now."

The crone made a low rasp but said nothing.

"I understand you're were planning on moving here, mam, but you really should have called first. You see, we're fresh out of room for mass murdering, babylonian old vampires like yourself in this city. And from what I'm told, that's pretty much the case for the rest of the world as well. I'm really sorry about this and I'd like to make it up to you. I hear hell is lovely this time of the year so what do you say I just help you on your way!"

Angel advanced toward her, readying his axe for the coming slicing and dicing but as he did, she lowered her head and extended her bony arms to each side. Then, he saw a sort of visual distortion appear around Lilith and rapidly grow to her sides until it filled the room.

—  
What the hell?

—  
Angel, deciding he didn't want to know what kind of sorcery this was, broke into a sprint, hoping to reach her in time to interrupt her spell. But before he got near the crone, the distortion wave shot at high speed in his direction, bending the walls and ceiling as it moved and struck him with the force of an explosion. The sheer violence of the blow sent the vampire flying backward and right through the thin wall of the warehouse. He flew all the way across the street and bounced off the roof of a car that was parked by the sidewalk, landing beside it.

The impact knocked the wind out of him and he felt a sharp pain in his back as well as throughout his chest that he suspected was coming from several cracked bones. This assault would have liquified any mortal on the spot but the vampire was considerably more resilient and even managed to rise to his knees. He looked to the warehouse to see that nothing was left of the wall he had just traversed, save for the pieces of it scattered on the street. But what's more, he also saw the white crone exit slowly the building through the gaping hole and stop just outside. She made a quick wave at him with her right hand and suddenly, the ground at her feet began to be split apart, as if it was being cut through by a massive yet invisible blade. The effect move in his direction at an astonishing rate and Angel barely had time to roll to his side to avoid it. Fortunately, the invisible force missed him by less than an inch, hitting instead the car he had landed on and sliced it in two halves.

The vampire got to his feet and was about to run to her but before he took even one step, he was hit with another distortion wave emanating from Lilith and was again sent hurtling back in the air. He fell near one side of the street almost twenty meters away and rolled for yet a few more feet before he came to a halt. More broken bones added themselves to the list of his injuries and now, he was seriously fighting to remain conscious. His vision was blurry and the only sound he could hear was the cracking of his bones as he tried to move. Angel then realized how dreadfully he had underestimated Lilith, based on her pathetic outlook and felt that this could very well be his last mistake. But he immediately dismissed the thoughts and concentrated his mind on regaining his bearings. His vision gradually cleared, his hearing returned and he somehow managed to will his aching body standing again. Just in the nick of time too for as soon as he was up, he heard a loud, screaming sound coming from his right. He turned to see a flipped over car that was sliding toward him at high speed. He mustered every last ounce of strength left in his legs and jumped over the vehicle, which flattened itself against the adjacent wall like a pancake. The vampire landed on his feet and quickly searched for Lilith with his eyes. He found her standing further down the street, in the middle of it, and she was smiling at him.

—  
I'll wipe that smile off your ugly face you wretched hag!

In a swift motion, he drew his last stake from his belt and threw it at the crone as hard as he could, aiming for her heart. But to his despair, the ancient vampire casually swatted aside the weapon in mid-fight with her hand. Then she lowered her head, made a loud rasping sound and pointed her talon at Angel. Right after she did, his body started to shake and he felt a mild, stinging pain coming from his guts. As the shaking grew in intensity, so did the pain until it felt like his body was ripping itself apart from the inside out. However, just as the agony was becoming unbearable, it ceased all of a sudden. The vampire looked at Lilith and saw her waver and fall to her knees. She looked exhausted from the previous show of power and Angel breathed a sigh of relief.

She has limits, thank God! I couldn't take much more of this.

"Aw! See what happens when people your age get all rattled up?" he told her sarcastically. "You have to realize you're not two hundred anymore! But don't you worry about a thing here. I know just the thing that'll put you to ease permanently!"

Just as he was getting ready to put the crone out of everyone's misery, he noticed a movement to her side. He then saw a tall vampire walk onto the street and come stand between Lilith and him. He looked very young, had short blond hair and wore clothings that just seemed to large for him.

"Well well well! If it isn't the avenging Angel himself!" said the newcomer defiantly. "The self proclaimed King Solomon of the Los Angeles underworld. How nice of you to grace us with your presence."

"And you are?"

"Me? Name's Jordan and I'm Queen Lilith's faithful servant."

"Really? Seems to me, Jordan, that you put your money on the wrong horse here."

The blond vampire shot a quick glance at his master and shrugged.

"Bah! It's true the lady is feeling a bit under the weather right now, as would anyone after a thousand year long nap. But it's nothing a good steady supply of human blood won't fix. So don't sweat it, your majesty. Our queen'll be back on the saddle in no time and on her way to conquer this world with us at her side!"

"Real sorry to screw up your illusions like that, Jordi, but if you thought I was gonna let that happen, you're even dummier than you look. So why don't you be a good little roach and scurry on back to under your stone while I take good care of our queen here, ok?"

"Then I'm afraid it'll be my duty and my pleasure to stop you, my

beloved king."

"Yeah?" Angel said as he advanced. "You and what army?"

The Young vamp's smile widened.

"I'm so glad you asked!" he answered as the street to his sides filled itself with vampires that were coming out of adjacent alleys and buildings. As they all came to stand beside Jordan, Angel's heart sank. He counted at least two dozens and most of them were armed with stakes, clubs, axes and other vicious weapons. Even at the top of his form, he wasn't deluded into believing he could beat those odds. And right now, even standing required an effort on his part.

—

Me and my big mouth!

—

"Who was it that said; the king is dead. Long live the Queen!" yelled Jordan. The other vamps answered with a loud battle cry and charged forward. Angel, knowing full well that this was a fight he simply couldn't win, turned tail and ran as fast as his wounded legs would allow with the large, homicidal vampire mob hot on his trail.

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## Chapter Seven

They say that pain is the best indication that you're still alive. Well, technically, Angel was dead, being a vampire and all, but he was feeling a truckload of pain right now. Every muscle in his body ached and so many of his bones were broken that he could barely move a limb without hearing a sickening cracking sound. Any human suffering his level of wounds would have passed out by now, if not died outright. But again, being a vampire blessed him with the resilience to remain conscious and very much aware of his injuries. Thankfully, his vampiric nature also provided him with astonishing healing capabilities but it would still be several hours before he was in top shape again. That was of course assuming he would survive the night. The vampire legions of Lilith had hunted him around this deserted neighborhood for only God knew how long. On three occasions, some of them had caught up to him and he forced to fight them off. Angel had killed seven of the vamps so far but more always seemed to come out of the woodworks. And they were rapidly wearing him out.

He had been thus far unable to leave the area as every streets were guarded by the vamps in groups of four to six. And since the vampire no longer had the strength to take on more than one or two at the time, he was forced to move stealthily from one hiding place to another until a better solution presented itself. At the moment, he had concealed himself in a trash container, near the boundaries of the neighborhood and was watching a group of four fledglings that patrolled the street. Impatience was gaining them quickly, as it often does for young vampires, and they seemed about to abandon the chase. But one of their number kept reminding them the price of failure and so they kept on searching. Angel wanted to wait them out a while longer but one of the vamps was coming his way, obviously intent on

checking out the container. When he got near his position, the vampire sprang from his hiding place and kicked the surprised vamp in the face, sending him crashing down on the ground. He then broke for the main street, confident he could make it out this time.

"What are you waiting, you morrons?!" yelled the vamp leader. "After him!"

The four vampires immediately gave chase. Angel was running as fast as his current condition allowed but he knew it was not nearly fast enough. The vamps would catch up to him in no time if he tried to beat them with pure speed so he headed for an adjacent alley, hoping to lose them as he had done a few times already. But shortly after entering the alley, he realized the critical error he had just made; the alley was a dead end. Worse, there were absolutely no doors or windows on any of the walls, which were too high to be jumped over. The vampire turned around and tried to get out of this trap before his pursuer reached him but he was too late. The four vamps entered the alley and blocked his only way out.

"Now wasn't that thoughtfull of you to run into a dead end like that," said the vamp leader, licking his lips. "Queen Lilith will reward us well when we bring her your ashes."

Angel considered his tactical situation and it did not look good. Four vamps were a challenge under ideal circumstances. They were all armed and eager for the kill while he had no weapons left and was on the verge of exhaustion.

He backed away toward the end of the alley and they followed him in. The leader had with him some sort of spear, while his companions all had stakes. They were leering at him and were joking about how they would savor this moment. When Angel's back reached the wall, they attacked. He dodged the first one, grabbed him by his clothes and smashed him in the wall behind him. He then kicked the second one in the groin and followed with an uppercut that sent the young vamp five feet back. But as he turned to face the other two, the leader struck him hard in the head with the pole of his spear. The blow stunned Angel and he fell to the ground. The other vamps started kicking him in the face, chest and stomach. The vampire didn't even have the strength to protect himself anymore and every kick weakened his hold over consciousness a little more.

"All right, that's enough fun, you guys!" yelled the leader. "Pick him up and hold him steady, so I can finish him off!"

The other vamps grabbed his arms and raised him to his knees. Angel lifted his head to look upon his executioner, whom raised his spear above his shoulder with both hands, about to deliver the killing blow.

"As Jordan said earlier, the king is dead!"

But just as he was about to strike, he froze up and his eyes widened. He looked down at his chest to see the pointy end of a crossbow bolt jutting out of his heart and disintegrated into a cloud of dust. Angel and the vamps looked toward the alley's entrance where the bolt came from. Standing there was a strikingly beautiful young woman clad in a dark, body-fitting suit and wearing a black leather jacket. She had curly blond hair and the milky skinned face of an angel. The

young woman was still holding the discharged crossbow pointed at the group and Angel's heart nearly started beating again when he recognized his savior as none other than Buffy Summers; the dreaded Slayer.

"Hello, boys," she said, dropping the crossbow. "Is this a private party, or can anyone crash?"

One of the vampires ran toward her, snarling and waiving his stake menacingly. Buffy calmly drew her own stake and met him half way. Using the confusion brought on by the Slayer's arrival, Angel called upon reserves he didn't know he had and used his captors to somersault backward, landing behind them. He quickly grabbed their heads and banged them against one another. Then he threw the one on his right on his back and head butted the other. But as he started running to Buffy, the vamp on his right got up and jumped him from behind and brought him down to his knees. Angel caught in time the stake intended for his heart and was now locked into a fight for his very survival. The vamp was holding by the neck with one arm and forcing his stake toward Angel's chest with the other while the later was desperately trying to hold it off. The Slayer, for her part, was faring much better. She was dodging and blocking everyone of her attacker's attempt at killing her followed by devastating counter-attacks in the form of punches and kicks. His punishment went on for a few more seconds and then, when she saw an opening, Buffy staked the vamp and ended the one way fight. She to Angel and saw the predicament he was in.

"Angel, catch!" she yelled as she threw him her stake. The vampire caught the weapon with his free hand and abruptly reeled his head back, catching the vamp square in the face. He then twisted his torso and plunged the stake in the vampires chest, killing him instantly. Buffy ran up to him and helped him to his feet.

"Angel!" she said with a worried voice. "Are you all right?"

"What the hell are you doing here, Buffy?" was his only response. She let him fall back to the ground and looked at him in disbelief.

"Well its nice to see you too! Now would you mind telling me what your problem is?"

Before he could answer, they heard movement coming from the alley's end. Angel stood up and they both turned to see the last vamp rise from the ground with a stake in his hand. Buffy started toward him but Angel caught her arm.

"No! We need him alive. He's gonna tell us where his new master sleepsâ€|aren't you?" he said to the vampire. The later looked at the two of them and snarled but realized the hopelessness of his situation. Before they could do anything to stop him, he turned the stake to him and placed it over his heart.

"Long live the Queen!!" he yelled, after which he ran into the wall and staked himself.

The two friends looked at his desintegrating body in shock.

"What the hell?" said the young woman turning to Angel. "Are they

suposed to do that?"

The vampire just looked at her and said nothing. He suddenly realized just how dangerous Lilith actually was. Not only was she very powerfull herself, but he had never seen or heard of any Master Vampire capable of inspiring this kind of loyalty.

—  
She has to be stopped!

—  
As Angel tried to walk, his body reminded him of how bad a shape he was in when he almost fell again. Luckily, Buffy was there to catch and support him. He looked into her clear blue eyes and managed a smile.

"Thanks. And sorry about my reaction earlier." he said apologetically.  
"Its just been a very bad night."

"I'll say. How much of it was due to this Lilith chick?"

Angel frowned and sighed loudly.

"I'm gonna kill Wesley!" he declared.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" she abmonished him. "Wesley respected your wishes, no matter how stupid they were. I accidentally over heard their conversation back in Sunnydale and i pestered the information out of Giles so if you wanna blame someone, blame me. When he said that you were planing to fight a Master Vampire on your own, i just had to come. So i grabbed my mom's car and here we are."

"We?"

Buffy hesitated a moment before continuing.

"Wellâ€|yes. Willow came with me, along with her new friend Tara. They're both whitches and i thought it might come in handy. And Xander wellâ€|he's never seen your office so he tagged along. They're all waiting for us there now."

Angel made another loud sigh.

"I have a feeling this is gonna be one of those weeks." he simply added as Buffy helped him walk out of the alley.

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When they entered the office, fifteen minutes later, Angel and Buffy were greeted by all their friends. As he had been told, there was Willow, Xander and a shy looking young blond girl he assumed was Tara. Wesley was also there along with Cordelia. Buffy helped him to the nearest chair and he was glad to finaly sit down. The pain in his muscles had diminished somewhat but it would be at least a day before he could go back out there.

"My God, Angel!" said Wesley. "She certainly did a number on you. I'll get something to patch you up right away."

"Come on," said Willow patting his knee. "I'm sure it looks worse than it feels and all."

But when he winced at her gesture, she withdrew her hand.

"Oh! sorry about that."

"Ok you guys! Just give him some breathing room!" interrupted Cordelia. But then she remembered he was a vampire and as such, did not breathe. "Or not. Well, give him some room anyway."

"Hey, nurse Cordelia." said Xander. "Why all the fuss here? Its not like he's gonna die, you knowâ€¦ being allready dead and all."

Cordelia glared angrily at the young man's sarcasm and turned to the vampire again.

"Angel," she said, lowering her voice. "we have to talk."

"We sure do!" declared Buffy, joining the conversation. "You have some explaining to do here. Like, for instance, what ever possessed you to go up against a Master on your own. Don't you remember how hard Lothos was to defeat? It took the concerted efforts of all the gang back then. Why should this situation be any different?"

"And while the mood is on questions and answers," Xander said, stepping forward. "Would you like to tell us who's your new friend here?"

Angel looked at the boy and frowned

"What new friend?" he asked, following Xander gaze. Thats when he saw there was someone else there, standing in a dark corner of his office.

"Thats quite a little following you got assembled here, Angel." noted the bandana man as he stepped out of the shadows. "You must be really swell guyâ€¦ for a two legged leech, that is."

Everyone's attention was now on the man while he, in turn, was examining them.

"Lets see now. We have a couple of witches, a wise-cracking smart ass, a fashionable seer, a former watcherâ€¦ and a Slayer, no less. Quite the motley crue indeed."

Ignoring the seering pain it caused him, Angel literally sprang from his chair, grabbed the man by his collar and brutally pinned him against the wall.

"Ok then here's the deal, Mary, or John Doehtery or whatever the hell you call yourself!" ordered the angry vampire. "I've had a lousy last couple of days, tonight being the worst by far, and i'm in the mood for really beat you to a bloody pulp unless you answer the questions i'll put to you to my satisfaction. I've spent the last two days searching

for Lilith and every time i turn around,there you are. Now i know for a fact that you are somehow involved in this so what i'd like to know is who you are and what that involvement is. You have ten second to answer. After that,i start breaking bones!"

But the man's smug smile did not diminish in the least at the threats.

"Temper temper,child. There's really no need to get upset. We're all on the same team hereâ€|And besides," the man added as he put his hands on Angel's wrists and surprised the vampire by forcibly taking them off of his collar. "the effect of your threats are somewhat diminished by your inability to carry them out,don't you think?"

He shoved Angel back and casually reajusted his collar. The vampire was about to charge him again but Cordelia grabbed his arm and held him back.

"Angel,wait! He's here to help us!"

"You should listen to you seer friend here,vampire." the man councled. "You have met Lilith tonight,from the looks of you. I have no idea how you managed to survive but i'm quite sure you now have a better understanding of what kind of monster she is. Your race is a plague on humanity to be sure but she is an apocalyptic nightmare and must be stopped at all costs. And i need your help to stop her. Its as simple as that."

Angel grudgingly calmed himself down and was helped back to his chair by Cordelia..

"All right!" Buffy said. "You wanna lend a helping hand. Thats great but i'd like to know who you really are and how come you seem to know so much about this Lilith."

"There's really no time for this,young Slayer." the man countered. "Our only advantage right now is that Lilith is still weak,from her imprisonment. But every passing hour and every victim she drains of its blood brings her one step closer to regaining her full power. And trust me on this,its not something any of you wants."

"Well i'm not about to ask my friends to follow into battle someone who won't even tell us his name and Angel is in no condition to fight anybody right now. So it looks like we do have some time after all,mister."

The man glared at Buffy for a long time and finaly sighed in resignation.

"Very well then but you kids better pull up a chairâ€|this may take a while. And i'm warning here. Some of the things i'm about to tell you may be hard for you to hear."

"I believe i speak for everyone when i say we'll take our chances," said Wesley as he was applying some bandages over Angel's wounds.

"Suit yourselves." the bandana man answered. He waited until all were confortably installed and then cleared his throat.

"Ok then. Where to begin?"

He turned to Angel.

"What do you know about the legend of the Dark Root?" he asked the vampire.

"You mean aside from the fact she's not a legend anymore? Not much really. From what i've heard, she's the first vampire of the world and she sired our race. Thats about it."

"Thats pretty much the essence of it yes, but the story is slightly inaccurate." the man continued. "Though thats not really surprising, considering how old it is. Lilith is behind the spread of your kind throughout the world but she was not the first vampire. That dubious honnor befell my oldest child, Enoch."

"What?!" they almost all yelled in unison.

"But how can this be?" Angel asked in disbelief. "You're human, aren't you? And you're telling us that you're as old as the vampire race?"

"Actualy, my birth predates the appearance of vampires by a few centuries," the man admited, to Angel's further dismay.

"Wait a minute!" interupted Wesley as if alarmed by what he just heard. "Did you say Enoch?"

The man noded.

"Whats wrong, Wesley?" Cordelia asked, worried at his reaction.

"Enoch is a very old name found in the bible. It was the name of a city. One of the very first cities build by humans." he explained. "It was also the name of the man who ruled over that city. The city itself was build for Enoch and named after him by his father. And from what i read about it, it was a place of absolute evil governed by demons where some of the worst atrocities were committed against humanity."

"I hate to sound cold hearted here," Angel said "but a city ruled by demons isn't exactly unheard off, Wesley."

"Yes i know but you see, according to the book of genesis in the old testament, the father of Enoch, and the man who build the city, was Cain!"

The whole gang though about the revelation for a moment, trying to determine why the name sounded so familiar to them. Then it hit them and they turned to the bandana man and looked at him in disbelief. It was Buffy who finally broke the silence.

"You mean to tell us that you're Cain!"

"Indeed, young Slayer. I am Cain. The accursed wanderer. The father of murder. And the first born son of Adam and Eve."

TO BE CONTINUEDâ€|

End  
file.